

THE DEACON'S CLOCK.

A Lover in a Fix.

THE OLD clock in the kitchen had just struck nine. It was no gilded toy, no trifle of bronze, or alabaster, but a tall, square, solid relic of the olden time looking not unlike a coffin case set on end, in the corner—a clock that had lasted through one generation, and, to judge from all appearance, was quite likely to last through another. Deacon Merritt cherished that old time piece with a sort of pride which he himself would scarcely have confessed to.

There was a great ruddy fire of chestnut logs in the wide red brick-paved fireplace, and the candles in the polished brass stick were winking merrily from the high wooden mantle, where they shared the post of honor with a broken sea shell and a plaster basket of improbably colored fruit. At the windows a curtain of gaudy chintz shut out the million stars of the frosty autumnal night, and on the cozy rug of parti-colored rags, a fat tortoise-shell cat purred away the slowly lapsing minutes.

But the tortoise-shell cat was not the only inhabitant of the snug farm-house kitchen.

"John!" said Mchitable Merritt, decidedly, "if you don't behave yourself, I'll—"

What she would do Hetty Merritt did not say—the sentence was terminated by a laugh that set the dimples round her mouth in motion, just as a beam of June sunshine plays athwart a cluster of red-ripe cherries.

Hetty Merritt was just seventeen—a plump, rosy girl, with jet-black hair, brushed back from her forehead, and perfectly arched eyebrows that gave a bewitching expression of surprise to a pair of melting hazel eyes. She was rather dark, but the severest critic would hardly have found fault with the peach-like bloom upon her cheeks, and the dewy red of her full, dainty-curved lips.

Evidently, Mr. Aylmer was quite satisfied with Hetty's peculiar style of beauty.

"Come, Hetty," said John, moving his chair where he could best watch the firelight upon her face, and picking up the thread of conversation where he had dropped it, when it became necessary for Hetty to bid him behave himself.

"You might promise. It's nine o'clock, and your father will soon be home."

"Promise what, John?" said Hetty, demurely, fitting a square of Turkey-red patch-work to a white one, and intently observing the effect.

"Nonsense, Hatty; you know what very well. Promise to marry me before Christmas! I tell you what, Hetty it's all very well for you to keep putting off, but I can't stand it, what with your father's forbidding me the house, and Caleb Truman's coming here every Saturday night—"

Hetty gave her pretty head a toss.

"As if Caleb Truman's coming here makes any difference in my feelings, John!"

"No, but, Hetty, it isn't pleasant, you know. I'm as good a man as Caleb Truman, if I don't own railroad shares, and keep an account at Brigham Bank, and I love you, Hetty, from the very bottom of my heart! Hetty, this matter lies between me and you only—no other person in the world has a right to interfere between us. Come, promise me!"

He held both her hands in his, and looked into her liquid brown eyes.

"Do you love me, Hetty?"

"You know I love you, John."

"Then we may just as well—Hush! what's that?"

It was not a very pleasant place of refuge, inasmuch as his shoulders were squeezed in on either side, and his head flattened against the springs and wheels above, and the air was unpleasantly close—but honest John made the best of matters, and shook with suppressed laughter in his solitary prison cell.

"Phew! a jolly scrape to be in," John thought, "and no knowing when I'll be out of it! Hetty's a shrewd little puss, however, and I can't do better than leave matters in her hands."

"So you haven't gone to bed, Hetty?" said Deacon Merritt, slowly unwinding the two yards of woollen comforter in which he generally encased his throat of an evening.

"Not yet, father," said Hetty, picking up her scattered bits of patchwork with a glowing cheek. "Did you have a pleasant meeting?"

"Well, yes," quoth the deacon, reflectively, sitting down before the fire, greatly to Hetty's consternation—she had hoped he would have gone quietly to bed, according to his usual custom; "tol'ly pleasant. Elder Jones was there, and Elder Backstrecher, and—well, all the church folks pretty much. Why, how red your cheeks are, Hetty! Tired, ain't you? Well, you needn't set up for me, dear; it must be getting late."

"The deacon glanced mechanically around to the clock. Hetty felt the blood grow cold in her veins.

"Twenty minutes past nine—why, it must be later than that! Why, land o' Goshen! The old clock's stopped!"

The old clock had stopped; nor was it wonderful, considering all the circumstances.

"I wound it up this mornin', I'm sartin," said the deacon perturbedly. "It never served me such a trick before, all the years it stood. Your Aunt Kesiah used to say that whenever that clock stopped it was a sign of a death or a marriage in the family before the year was out."

There was a suppressed sound like a chuckle behind the clock case as Deacon Merritt fumbled on the shelf for the clock key.

"These springs must be out of order somehow," said the deacon decisively.

"How scared you look, child! There is no cause for bein' scared. I don't put no faith in your Aunt Kesiah's old-time superstition. Where in the name of all possessed is the key? I could ha' declared I left it in the case."

"Isn't it on the shelf, father?" asked Hetty, guiltily conscious that it was snugly reposing in the pocket of her checked gingham dress.

"No; nor 'taint on the set-off, neither."

And down went the deacon, stiffly enough, on his knees, to examine the floor, lest, perchance, the missing key might have slipped off and fallen down there.

"Well, I never knowed anything so strange," said the deacon.

"It is strange," faltered hypocritical Hetty.

"I'll have a reg'lar sarch to-morrow," said Deacon Merritt. "It must be somewhere around."

"Yes, it must," said Hetty, tremulously.

"Only," went on the deacon, slowly resuming his place before the cheery blaze, "I kind o' don't like to have the clock stand still a single night. When I wake up, you know it seems like if it was talking to me in the stillness."

Hark! was that the wail of the wind, or was it something to her literally nearer and dearer? Yes—she could not be mistaken now—it was actually a snore!

Hetty rose softly to her feet with renewed hope. Surely, now was the accepted time.

Noislessly as a floating shadow she crossed the hall, opened the kitchen door, and stole across the creaking floor.

The shifting lustre of the fire-light revealed to her Deacon Merritt nodding before the fire with closed eyes, and hands hanging at his sides.

"He is certainly asleep," thought Hetty.

With a heart that beat quick and fast, like the stroke of a miniature hammer, she drew the key from her dress pocket and proceeded, in spite of the nervous trembling of her fingers, to fit it into the lock. So absorbed was she in her task that she never noted the sudden cessation of the heavy breathing—never saw the deacon start suddenly into wakefulness, and look around towards her.

Ah, Hetty, love is blind, they say, and it is equally true that love is sometimes deaf!

The deacon rose quietly up with a shrewd twinkle in his eyes, and Hetty gave a little frightened shriek as a hand fell softly on her arm, possessing itself quietly of the key.

"Let me help you," said Deacon Merritt.

"Father, I—I found the key," faltered Hetty, "and—"

"Found the key, eh?!" returned the deacon. "Well, that's lucky—and now you can find out what's the matter with the old clock!"

Hetty's heart throbbing so wildly a moment before, seemed to stand absolutely still as Deacon Merritt turned the key and opened the tall door of the clock-case.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Deacon Merritt, as Mr. John Aylmer tumbled laughingly into the room. "So you was the matter with the old clock, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Aylmer, composedly. "I hope I haven't seriously interfered with the works of the clock?"

"You've seriously interfered with me, though!" said the deacon, waxing indignant. "What do you mean, sir, by hiding in my house like a thief?"

"Indeed, indeed, father," cried Hetty, bursting into tears, "it wasn't his fault. He didn't want to hide, but I put him in there."

"You did, eh? And may I ask what for?"

"Father," faltered Hetty, rather irresolutely, "I love him—and—he loves me?"

"Is that any reason he should hide in a clock-case, miss?"

"No—but father! O, father, I can never marry Caleb Truman! He is old, and cross, and withered, and—"

Hetty's eyes finished the sentence for her. The deacon looked down, not unkindly, on her bowed head, and the tender arms that supported it. Apparently the course of true love, roughly though it ran, was overwhelming all his worldly wise arrangements in its tide.

The Three Preachers.

IT is well known that some of the Judges in Missouri are very reluctant to enforce the law against ministers of the gospel for exercising their profession without having taken the test oath, and avail themselves of every pretence to discharge those who are accused. We tell the following tale as it is told to us, vouching for nothing:

Three ministers, charged with the crime of preaching "the glorious gospel of the son of God," were arraigned before a certain judge. They were regularly indicted, and it was understood that the proof against them was very clear.

"Are you a preacher?" said the Judge to one of them.

"Yes, sir," replied the culprit.

"To what denomination do you belong?"

"I am a Christian, sir." (With dignity.)

"A Christian! What do you mean by that? Are not all preachers Christians?"

"I belong to the sect usually called—but wrongly called—Campbellites." (Not so much dignity.)

"Ah! Then you believe in baptizing people, in order that they may be born again, do you?"

"I do, sir."—Defiantly.—

"Mr. Sheriff, discharge that man! He is an innocent man! He is indicted for preaching the gospel, and there is not a word of gospel in the stuff he preaches! It is only some of Alexander Campbell's nonsense. Discharge the man!"

Exit Campbellite, greatly rejoicing.

"Are you a preacher?" said the Judge, addressing the second criminal.

"I am, sir," said the miscreant.

"Of what denomination are you?"

"I am a Methodist, sir."—His looks showed it.—

"Do you believe in falling from grace, sir?"

"I do, sir."—Without hesitation.—

"Do you believe in sprinkling people, instead of baptizing them?"

"I believe that people can be baptized by sprinkling."—Much offended.—

"Do you believe in baptizing babies?"

"It is my opinion, sir, that infants ought to be baptized."—Indignantly.—

"Not a word of Scripture for anything of the kind, sir!" shouted his honor.

"Mr. Sheriff, turn that man loose! He is no preacher of the gospel. The gospel is truth, and there is not a word of truth in what that man teaches! Turn him loose! It is ridiculous to indict men on such frivolous pretences! Turn him loose!"

Methodist disappears, not at all hurt in his feelings by the judicial abuse he had received.

"What are you, sir?" said the Judge, to third felon.

"Some people call me a preacher, sir."—Meekly.—

"What is your denomination?"

"I am a Baptist."—Head up.—

His Honor's countenance fell, and he looked sober and sad. After a pause he said:

"Do you believe in salvation by grace?"

"I do."—Firmly.—

"Do you teach that immersion only, is baptism?"

"That is my doctrine, sir."—Earnestly.—

"And you baptize none but those who believe in Jesus Christ?"

"That is my faith and practice."—With emphasis.—

"My friend, I fear it will go hard with you. I see you are indicted for preaching the gospel, and it appears to me that by your own confession you are guilty."

Baptist looked pretty blue.

"May it please your Honor," said the Baptist's counsel, springing to his feet, "that man never preached the gospel. I have heard him say a hundred times that he only tried. I have heard him try myself."

"Mr. Sheriff, discharge this man! He is not indicted for trying! There is nothing said about the mere effort! Let him go, sir! I am astonished that the State's attorney should annoy the court with frivolous indictments."

Exit Baptist, determined to "try" again.

Court adjourned.

"God save the State and this honorable court!" exclaimed the Sheriff.

"Amen!" said the three preachers.

A young lady, recently married to a farmer, one day visited the cow-house, when she thus interrogated the milkmaid: "By-the-by, Mary, which of these cows gives the butter-milk?"

SUNDAY READING.

Redeeming the Time.

Time abates not its speed, but rather seems to fly with increasing swiftness as we grow older. Nor is this to be regretted if our years are bearing us in the right direction, for then, we shall be the sooner in heaven with the Lord Jesus, in whom we trust, and after whom we are sighing; but if, on the other hand, every instant is drifting us onward to eternal misery, it should cause us the deepest alarm. Like the dove's wing, with silken sound, time passes us; but when once departed, if our spirits be condemned by the Great Judge of all, it will have the talons of a vulture with which to tear our inmost hearts. Within the next hour, dear reader, you may have entered upon eternity, and what if that eternity should be dark with sin's unending night, and bitter with its ceaseless punishment? Time is your hour of escape from condemnation; throw it away and your fetters are riveted forever. It were better and more wise to throw empires away, than to waste the hours of this precious life. Heaven is on the wing of moments; seize them, for all the wealth of worlds will one day be too little to buy so much as one of them. Death cannot be avoided; he has laid siege to us, and from the beleaguered city of Manhood none can escape. You must soon leave all earthly things, to meet your God in judgment.

Dear reader, if still unconverted, permit me to remind you that you are by nature a lost sinner. Have you considered this? Has your mind been fitly impressed with a sense of your dangerous condition? If not, how is it that you can be so inconsiderate? You look to the health of your body, how can you neglect that part of your nature which is so much more noble, namely, your immortal soul! Be wise and think. Oh, that you would consider your state with seriousness and candor, until you feel compelled trembling to cry, "What must I do to be saved?" It is not too late to ask that question, nor to receive a comfortable reply. There is salvation for all those who trust Him, and so suffered that none of their offences can ever be laid to their charge. He has discharged the debts of His people, so that they are clear before the judgment seat of God.

O, reader, if you can but trust the Lord Jesus, it will go well with you, for you shall have the joy of present peace and the hope of future bliss. He whose pen now traces these lines, beseeches you to lay hold on eternal life, and more, he beseeches the Lord Jesus to lay hold on you. To be safely sheltered in the wounds of Jesus is blessedness beyond conception; try the clefts of this rock, and your heart shall be at rest.—C. H. Spurgeon.

The Lost Jewels.

Suppose you had a beautiful necklace of pearls and diamonds, and some day, while you were walking the streets, a thread of it should become loosened, and one by one your precious gems should fall to the ground and be lost amidst the dust of the street. How you would grieve over the loss! How unkind you would think it of any one who saw your misfortune and did not tell you of it in season to save your jewels!

Every day, you are losing a jewel more precious than any gem from the mine. Unless you are in Christ's fold, you have lost another golden day in which you might have turned to Him. You are lying down to sleep unpardoned, and oh! what if you should not awake again!

Would you not think a person worse than foolish, who should pettishly turn away when warned of losing a costly necklace, even growing angry with the friend who warned her? Yet those who do not love Jesus, hate to be warned of their danger. They often turn away with a flushed and an angry brow, from the kind friend who urges them to seek for safety, where alone they can find it.

It is not much to lose fine jewels.—They can be replaced again, or the owner can be just as happy and useful without them. But oh, to lose the soul! There is no repairing that loss! And when the soul is lost, all is lost! All the fine things that the eyes have taken such a delight in, must also be left.

Oh, hasten to the open arms of Jesus! He loves to gather the little lambs into His bosom. He loves to have them willingly and cluster about His feet.—He is never tired of their presence. All—are all are welcome.

A little learning often breeds scepticism. Profound knowledge leads back to Jesus.